

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

August 01-07, 2011

A famous Belarusian HR activist and a BAJ member Ales Bialatski was detained by agents from the Department of Financial Investigations within the period under review. The news became the focal event of the week and caused a broad international response. The civil rights defender is accused of large-scale tax evasion (article 243, part 2 of Belarus' Criminal Code). According to the article, A. Bialatski can be sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment with deprivation of property.

The detention was reasoned by financial information about A. Bialatski's bank accounts in Lithuania, sent to the Belarusian law-enforcement bodies by the Ministry of Justice of Lithuania. However, according to A. Bialatski's colleagues, the funds on his accounts were aimed at the HR activities only. They believe the detention is connected with A. Bialatski's civil activity and the financial assistance, provided by "Viasna" HR Center to political prisoners and victims of political repressions in Belarus.

"It looks absolutely logical that following politicians and journalists, human rights activists have appeared in the epicenter of political repressions. It is them, who have taken care of hundreds of victims of political repressions in Belarus and their relatives and spared them from facing alone the trouble, bewilderment and helplessness," BAJ Chair Zhanna Litvina commented upon the Association member's detention. She called upon the official authorities to release A. Bialatski immediately and terminate persecution of human rights activists in Belarus.

Tatsiana Shaputska, a "Novy Chas" non-state newspaper's correspondent was sentenced to 10 days of arrest on administrative charges in Drybin (Mahilou region) on **August 3, 2011**. The journalist had been detained under the walls of Horki Colony (Mahilou region) on August 2, 2011, while covering a civil action in support of a political prisoner Zmitsier Dashkievich. According to the reporter, she was detained, despite producing her editorial ID.

The journalist spent a night in a police station. Then she was put on trial together with the action participants in Drybin on the following day. The policemen presented several frames from their video records, where the journalist was passing a portrait of Zmitsier Dashkevich from one action participant to another as vivid evidence of her guilt.

On **August 3, 2011**, the Belarusian Association of Journalists received an official reply from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the request of July 5, 2011 to arrange immediately a meeting with participation of BAJ leaders and the Ministerial senior officials.

The Acting Head of Ministerial Department on Information and Public Relations **Viktar Novikau** noted in his letter of reply that it would be "reasonable to hold a working meeting of officials from the Ministry of Information, the Prosecutor General's office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, mass media and journalists' civil organizations."

It is worth mentioning that Deputy Chairs of BAJ A. Bastunets and A. Starykevich had an appointment with Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Yauhien Paludzien on July 21, 2011. Following the meeting, there was reached an agreement in principle to arrange a common discussion with participation of officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the journalistic community representatives.

The agents from the Department of Financial Investigations detained the Head of "Viasna" HR Center and a BAJ member Ales Bialatski for 10 days on **August 4, 2011**. There were conducted searches at the civil activist's private apartment and summer house. A. Bialatski is accused of large-scale tax evasion (article 243, part 2 of Belarus' Criminal Code). According to the article, A. Bialatski can be sentenced up to 7 years of imprisonment with deprivation of property. Firstly, he was convoyed to the Department jail. Then, he was sent to the pre-trial isolation ward in Valadarski Street in Minsk. A. Bialatski's colleagues believe the detention is connected with his civil activity and the financial assistance, provided by "Viasna" HR Center to political prisoners and victims of political repressions in Belarus.

As reported on **August 6, 2011**, Iryna Khalip, wife to a former Presidential candidate A. Sannikau and a Russian "Novaya Gazeta" newspaper correspondent had got registered in police. The journalist will have to come for a check to the local police station once a week before the two-year period of her punishment deferment expires. Also, the journalist will be banned to leave her apartment after 10 pm.

It is worth reminding that Zhanna Brysina, the judge of Zavodski City District of Minsk sentenced Iryna Khalip to two years of jail with the deferment of punishment for two years as if for 'taking part in the actions that violated the public order' after a peaceful protest meeting on December 19, 2010.

***Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service***